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### Taking On the Global Boss: An Interview with Paul Garver of the IUF

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## Taking On the Global Boss: An Interview with Paul Garver of the IUF

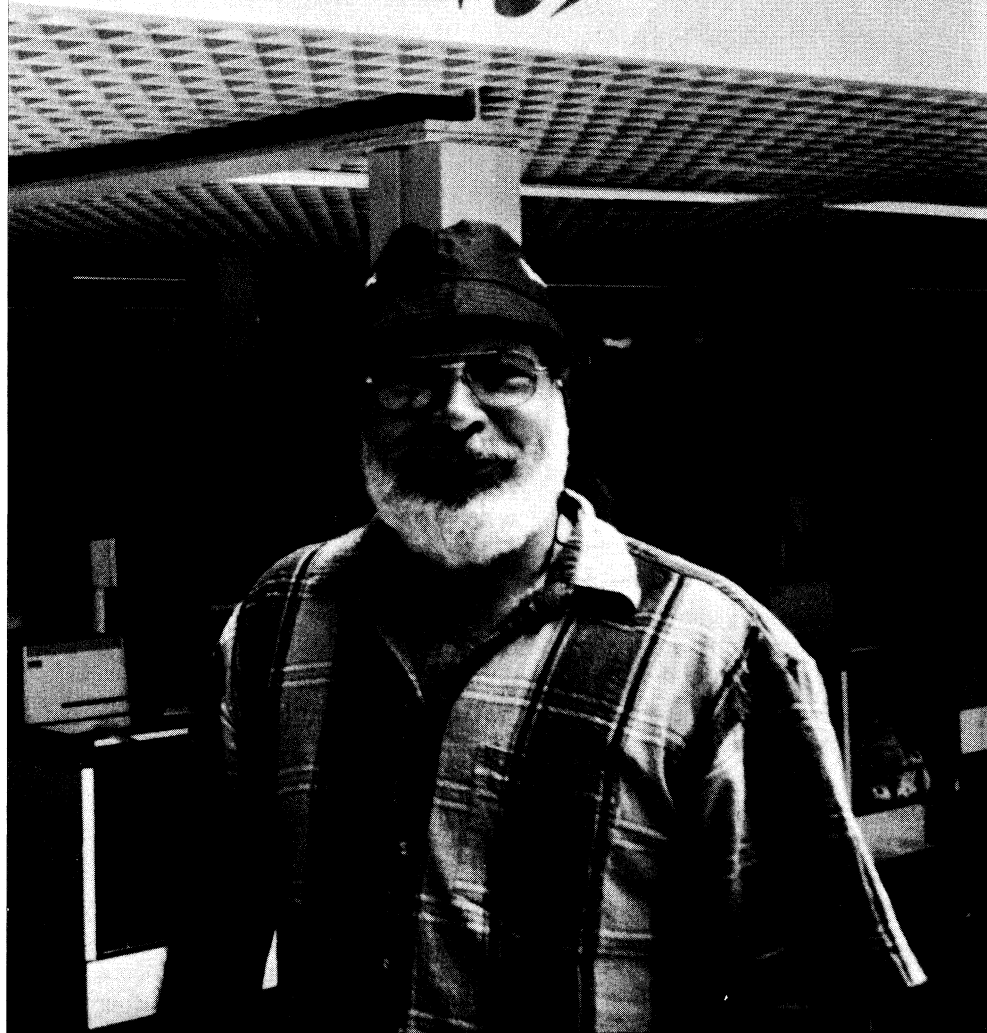
### Abstract

[Excerpt] Paul Garver is a coordinator on transnational corporations at the International Union of Food, Agriculture, Tobacco, Hotel, Restaurant and Allied Workers (IUF), an international trade union secretariat (ITS). The IUF has three staff people who coordinate the work of IUF in dealing with transnational corporations operating within IUF industries. This interview was conducted by LRR Associate Editor Andy Banks, who is the Education Officer for Public Services International (PSI), the ITS for public sector unions. Both are based in Geneva, Switzerland.

### Keywords

labor movement, anti-union movement, IUF, multi-national corporations, international trade unions

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**P**aul Garver pictured in front of the French "Hyper-Market" Carrefour, in the small French city of Annecy. When the grocery corporation tried to open up nonunion in the Philadelphia area, the United Food and Commercial Workers mounted an international campaign with the assistance of the IUF.

# Taking On the Global Boss

**An Interview with Paul Garver of the IUF**

■ *Andy Banks*

Paul Garver is a coordinator on transnational corporations at the International Union of Food, Agriculture, Tobacco, Hotel, Restaurant and Allied Workers (IUF), an international trade union secretariat (ITS). The IUF has three staff people who coordinate the work of IUF in dealing with transnational corporations operating within IUF industries. This interview was conducted by LRR Associate Editor Andy Banks, who is the Education Officer for Public Services International (PSI), the ITS for public sector unions. Both are based in Geneva, Switzerland.



**LRR:** What does the IUF Transnational Department do?

**Garver:** We provide information on transnational corporations and help build cross-border trade union structures within specific transnationals. For example, I am responsible for coordinating trade union activity internationally within Nestle.

**LRR:** Can you give us an example of a solidarity campaign involving a US-based transnational corporation?

**Garver:** A classic example is our campaign against Coca Cola in Guatemala. There were two different periods; one around 1980 and the other, four years later. At a Coca Cola bottling franchise in Guatemala City the workers tried to form a union and there was

massive repression, and even assassination of members of the union's executive committee and the union president.

The struggle was basically to get Coca Cola to accept responsibility for the actions of their franchise holder and to intervene in disputes between franchise owners and their workers. At first, it was very difficult to get Coca Cola to acknowledge any responsibility, but finally, after we conducted an international boycott which generated massive publicity, Coca Cola changed the franchise holder. Several years later, the new owner closed the factory and we found ourselves running another campaign. This time, Coca Cola was somewhat quicker to find a new franchise holder, and now relations are very good there.

The Coca Cola campaign in Guatemala is known better than our campaigns involving unions in industrialized countries because it fits the more traditional approach of stronger unions in industrialized countries helping struggling unions facing repression in the Third World.

**LRR:** In your estimation, would it have been possible for unions in a country like Guatemala to have successfully instituted the international corporate campaign component in this case without the assistance of the IUF?

**Garver:** No, not the international component, but it cannot be overstated that the crucial factor behind this success was the determination and the ingenuity of the workers and their leaders. In 1984-85 they physically occupied the plant for a year. Without that the campaign would have collapsed before the IUF could have done anything significant.

**LRR:** Is it more common for you to be asked for only an international component of an already existing campaign, as with the Guatemalan workers? Or how often is the IUF asked to conduct a corporate campaign?

**Garver:** Usually, we are asked to provide only the international component though we do consult with unions on the overall campaign strategy. The IUF published some of our experiences in our *Manual on Transnational Corporations*. We also hold meetings around transnational companies which we have been able to get representatives from most of a company's unions to attend. We build on these networks which allow people to get to know each other and share some experiences. These networks create an international awareness among the various unions in a transnational company prior to any possible crisis they may experience with their employer.



Teamster Cynthia Zavala of Watsonville, California journeyed to Geneva, Switzerland to win international support for the Diamond Walnuts struggle.

**LRR:** In the U.S., some trade unionists hold the view of international trade union work as something that strong unions from industrialized countries do to support Third World unions who must survive under intensely oppressive conditions. Your case in Guatemala is a good example. How much of your work is used to assist unions from the industrialized countries, for example, the United States?"

**Garver:** At the present it is fairly well balanced, that is, unions in all regions request support and intervention and unions in all regions respond to these requests for support. However, each year we respond to more appeals for support from unions in industrialized countries.

**LRR:** Can you give us some examples of some of the types of things you may do with your U.S. affiliates?

**Garver:** There are two kinds of problems that come out of the United States, one is requests for assistance in organizing because of the tremendous resistance by companies in the U.S. to unionization and the other is in a severe bargaining situation where workers have been locked out, such as the Nestle factory in Chester-

ville, Ontario, and in the Ravenswood Aluminum and the Diamond Walnut campaigns. In these last two cases a great deal of visibility was given. In many more instances companies have been approached without such a public campaign but with the knowledge that they could face one if they refuse to cooperate. The stronger the networks are within the companies the more able we are to have influence without a public confrontation. It is surprising how often the IUF successfully uses these quieter dimensions.

**LRR:** What would a quieter dimension be? Is it an iron fist in a velvet glove? Do you go to the company and say, “Here’s the rest of us from the other unions you must deal with in other countries. You really don’t want to tick us off do you?”

**Garver:** Our rap to the company may go something like this: “Many of us enjoy a good relationship with your company and we hope to be able to maintain it. If you’re engaged in injuring one of our sister unions somewhere else in the world this puts a strain on our relationship everywhere. We would like for you to investigate this situation and use your influence to try to correct it.” Now the companies always tell us, of course, that they have no control over what the local management does. We don’t accept that. We hold the headquarters ultimately responsible, not only for its own direct subsidiaries, but also for its franchises, and for other companies with which it has a significant business relationship.

**LRR:** One image held by some American trade unionists who find themselves in a situation where they feel they may need assistance, especially from their European union counterparts, is that the strong European unions would take their members out of the strike in support of the U.S. workers. How realistic is that scenario?

**Garver:** The Coca Cola case in Guatemala is one of the few cases in the IUF where unions have actually disrupted production or distribution out of solidarity with workers in another country. In such cases there are violations of fundamental trade union and human rights.

We are advised by our affiliates that in general, they can protest, they can issue communications, they can inform their members about the problems, but for them to take industrial actions out of international solidarity is very rare. Right now we must remember that in many countries, like in the United States, there are heavy penalties against workers taking secondary action and that unions,

for example, in the United Kingdom are trying to find alternatives to strikes for the same reason that unions in the United States are trying to find alternatives. As time goes on, the structures that the IUF is building in major transnational companies will become better established, and the possibility of international coordination of industrial action will further come up.

**LRR:** Very few American trade unionists know that there are international trade union secretariats set up for just about every industrial sector. There is one for all the construction unions in the world, one for the teachers unions, one for manufacturing unions, transportation unions, public sector unions, and so forth. Typically, unions all over the world join the ITS established for their industrial sector. Why would a union in the U.S. use this structure for an international bargaining or organizing problem rather than going directly through the AFL-CIO structure?

**Garver:** In general, the ITSs are more geared toward assisting unions in industrial conflicts in specific industries across borders than national trade union centers such as the AFL-CIO. ITSs are made up of the same unions in the same sector, whereas national trade union centers are composed of unions from various sectors. National trade union centers aren't structured to react to industrial conflict at the multinational level as well as are most of the ITS's.

This sectoral capability of the ITSs can be seen in our current campaign against Stimson Lane Wines, a subsidiary of US Tobacco in Washington State. The United Farm Workers Union of Washington has called for an international boycott to get union recognition and a contract at Stimson Lane's vineyards. Stimson Lane's marketing strategy is to greatly increase its exports to Europe. IUF affiliates in Sweden have refused to handle these wines in stores, hotels and restaurants, effectively shutting off the Swedish market. Because the IUF has organized in all phases of the food and beverage industries, a rapid and effective response was possible in this case.

**LRR:** Why do you think national corporate campaigns in the U.S. are increasingly adding on an international component?

**Garver:** National trade union work has been permanently changed by the globalization of the economy and the increased role that transnational corporations are playing in determining economic decisions. These transnationals are being aided by the large international financial institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). It is obvious that the principal



international structures available to coordinate union activity to fight these powerful forces are the ITSs.

**LRR:** Some have stated that because transnational corporations and the international financial institutions are able to actually impose decisions on national governments, this has reduced the importance of traditional international labor strategies such as filing complaints with the International Labor Organization (ILO). It seems that the number of corporate campaigns against transnational corporations has risen in direct proportion to the degree that the power of these governments to oppose transnational organizations has decreased. Has this shift of power towards transnational corporations and international financial institutions meant a shift in strategy on the part of ITS's?



After Brazilian banks in the U.S. reneged on their pledge to remain neutral in UFCW's organizing drives, the union garnered the support of Brazilian unionists. Leaders of the National Confederation of Brazilian Bankworkers, representing 480,000 workers, met recently with UFCW vice president Beth Shulman (fifth from left) and Thomas Schlesinger (center) of the Southern Finance Project. Brazilian Worker's Party leader Luis Inacio Lula da Silva also appeared at a press conference in New York City, condemning the bankers' actions.

**Garver:** I reviewed the different decisions made within the IUF governing bodies since the mid-1960's with respect to transnational companies, and I think it's safe to say, from the 1980's on an increasing amount of the efforts of our secretariat has been dedicated to campaigns around transnationals.

Back in the 1970's there was optimism in some quarters about creating United Nations codes of conducts for multinational companies and over the usefulness of ILO tripartite declarations. These were designed to create a framework of international governance to deal with the increasing power of transnational corporations. What is left of those efforts are a number of very general, voluntary guidelines which are not legally enforceable. In fact, there is no international governance system for transnational corporate behavior. That means the only way that unions can build up countervailing power involving transnationals is through building up equivalent union coordinating bodies.

We still do work with the international labor codes and the International Labor Organization. There is the very important work of the our trade union education programs in the developing countries. But even here, the trend in the IUF is toward organizing education projects aimed at strengthening the organization of workers within specific transnationals.

**LRR:** Has this changed role for the ITS's meant a difference in which people from your affiliates that you deal with?

**Garver:** We deal more often with local level union officers and stewards and we deal with national union officers and staff who are responsible for particular companies, an industrial sector, or for organizing. We structure ways for them to work with their equivalents in other countries. Increasingly, we see that the work of international trade unionism is to develop union strategies of unions across national borders to deal with problems posed by transnational organizations.

**LRR:** It sounds like the type of work that ITS's are doing is becoming more like the normal work of trade unions. So does that mean that role of the international department of a union has also changed? Does it mean that the role is changing from an office that does international work to one which has as its primary responsibility, the linking of an international component to the work that the union is already doing?

**Garver:** The trend is definitely for unions to integrate the international dimension into all of the trade union work including education, including bargaining, and including organizing. When it is integrated into the union's education program, the content wouldn't be, "Here's what we do internationally." It would be, "Here's how we organize and bargain with companies today."

**LRR:** What are the harsh realities of international corporate campaign work? What are the lessons you have gleamed from your work on corporate campaigns day in and day out? What are the do's and don'ts of the international component to corporate campaigns?

**Garver:** I suppose the first "do" is that unions should just do it. There is almost always going to be an international aspect of the employer you are dealing with. Your employer doesn't even have to be a transnational corporation. There will be a possible international component anyway because of the globalization of the economy.

Take Diamond Walnut for example. Here is a situation where the company exists solely in California but 40% of its walnuts go to Europe. It has been part of the Teamsters' strategy in their fight to win a contract for its locked-out members to wage a war against Diamond in Europe. The global economics of the walnut industry dictated this strategy.

Another lesson is that international work takes time. Unfortunately it's probably still too frequent that translations from documents in the U.S. are confusing or misinterpreted by people in the country for whom the documents are being translated. It doesn't do much good to refer to the "NLRB" in a document destined for an audience outside U.S. borders. Once, an American union translated a local slogan directly into French without running it by the ITS first. The results were that thousands of leaflets were printed and distributed which had a vulgar connotation in some regions of France.

We have also learned that international campaigns can't be a substitute for the heart of any labor struggle—the work at the grass-roots level. International efforts almost always are something to add to a struggle and there is always the danger that a union will forego the fundamental organizing at the base for what may appear to be the more glamorous international component. The first question the IUF gets when we seek help from one union for another union is "What is being done in their own country to win the struggle?"

Related to this point, a union should involve rank and file workers in the international component of corporate campaigns. When the

Teamsters came to Europe to put pressure on Diamond Walnut, the delegation included Cynthia Zavala, one of the rank and file strikers. Her story drew tears to many eyes and garnered support for the campaign that would not have been forthcoming if the Teamsters had merely sent someone from headquarters.

It is important for American unions to realize that there are well established international trade union structures that must be used when conducting a campaign. Sometimes we may get a call from a European affiliate asking how to respond to a request for help from an American union. This approach wastes a great deal of time and leads to suspicion.

Another thing that creates suspicion is when an American union requests aid but is not affiliated with the ITS. This violates a fundamental principal of trade unionism—the obligation of membership and paying your dues. A corollary to this is that international solidarity is just that—solidarity, not charity. Solidarity is based on reciprocity and implies the recognition of mutual obligations. Unions are expected to return, in kind, international assistance to other unions around the globe.

**LRR:** On this issue, have you picked up on a general feeling in Europe that a lot of the help that has been going on in the area of international corporate campaigns has been one way—that is, from Europe to the U.S?

**Garver:** There's an imbalance in that it's now fairly well established for American unions to request assistance from unions in the host countries of transnationals based outside the United States. It's less common for European or Japanese unions to make the same requests involving U.S.-based transnationals.

A number of U.S. union people active in international affairs for years have been speaking about trying to alert others to the danger of U.S.-style industrial relations spreading around the world. They make a sound case. You don't need to make this case any more in the United Kingdom because they are now experiencing an American-style of industrial relations. You don't have to make the same point in New Zealand, because the same thing is happening there. There is a tendency toward a much more adversarial industrial relations coming from the employer's side, beginning in the Anglo-Saxon world, and I think it will reach the continent of Europe.

Therefore, the recent American union experience is increasingly relevant to European trade unions. It's not that European unions don't need solidarity from U.S. unions, but they are not used to



The BC&T has shared its analysis and strategies on labor management participation with its counterparts in Britain. Pictured above, International Executive Vice President and Organizing Director David Durkee (left) poses with leaders of the United Biscuit Union, Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers, and Food and Beverage Section of the Transport and General Workers Union.

asking for it. American unions have been kicked around enough for the past 10 years that they've swallowed whatever false pride stood in the way of requesting assistance when needed.

**LRR:** Before coming to the IUF three years ago you were a union representative for a large union in Pennsylvania. How relevant has this experience been in your current job ?

**Garver:** In the nearly three years that I've been with the IUF, I have found that the fact that I am an American out of the U.S. labor movement and have maintained my contacts with American unions, to be an advantage, not a disadvantage.

I've been going to a lot of European level meetings, bringing together people within companies—some of these are American-based TNCs—and the European unions don't have a very strong

sense, in some cases, that they are part of a TNC. Looking for these connections has become common for a union rep in the States.

When I recently went to a meeting of Heinz unions in Europe, Italy and the United Kingdom were well represented because of Heinz's large operations in those countries. The Italians were sure that this was a company called Plasmon. They really had only a vague concept that Plasmon was part of a transnational called Heinz. The British knew it was Heinz, but they thought Heinz was a UK corporation. What they didn't really realize was that two thirds of Heinz's turnover in activity is in North America, and that most of its corporate thinking and decision-making obviously is based on that experience.

I could say the same about Kellogg's which also has a large UK operation. The American companies have actually been very good at making themselves be thought of as a local entity. So there's not a lot of consciousness in Europe about transnationals based in the United States being foreign. Therefore, they don't automatically think that if they have a problem, they might be able to receive some advice or assistance, or maybe want to plan strategically together with a U.S. union.

**LRR:** What have been your biggest lessons since you came to work in the international labor movement?

**Garver:** The biggest thing I've learned is that the issues I confronted in the U.S. are exactly the same issues that I confront internationally: how to build a strong effective union, how to cope with new management initiatives, how to succeed in bargaining when a strike is not an effective weapon. These things are common to every union in every country I've been to.

To a great extent, this is because the employers are beginning to all behave alike. There is a worldwide employer offensive against labor taking place at the same time there is a globalization of the management practices of transnationals. Take the whole human resources movement from the U.S. Every transnational now has a department of human resources using some variation of Total Quality Management or Quality Circles. Certainly, one of the biggest American exports now is human resource management and labor consultants. I think if U.S. unions learned a little bit in dealing with these people we should share it. Ray Scannell and Dave Durkee, the research director and organizing director from the Bakery, Confectionery and Tobacco Workers (BCT) in the U.S. came as guest experts at a seminar by the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU) in the U.K.

The seminar was about new management techniques and we did not know what the reactions would be to these American trade unionists sharing their experiences. There was tremendous energy in the room. There were constant questions being fired at them from British shop stewards. The stewards said, "My god, that's what they're trying to do to us too. It's time we thought about that." Out of that seminar, the two unions and the IUF are developing a plan to jointly produce information on dealing with the introduction of technology and new management techniques.

**LRR:** What is the bottom line on how we should view international corporate campaign work?

**Garver:** The bottom line is it is important not to think of the international arena as being something separate and apart from normal trade union work. I think that extension into the international sphere is a natural and inevitable consequence of doing the job at the local and national levels. This is because the world has changed to the point that the economy is organized globally and internationally. The primary carriers are transnational corporations and, in the case of the public sector, the World Bank and the IMF.

Any effective strategy to represent workers today requires an international dimension. But not as a separate thing apart from the other work of unions. It should become part and parcel of everything a union does. ■

## RESOURCES

**Labor Research Review 13: Solidarity Across Borders** is LRR's first foray into international campaigns, trade policy, and solidarity at home and abroad. Available from MCLR for \$8.00 postpaid.

**Global Labour** is a new magazine on international labor news and analysis for trade unionists and social activists. Published with support from ICEF, IFBWW, IUF, and IFJ trade secretariats. Available for \$35/year at PO Box 33363, Washington, DC 20033.

**The Manual on Transnational Corporations** available from the IUF. (See information on next page.)